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ABSTRACT

This document, one of four concerned with the training of paraprofessional school personnel, provides 15 situations of varying complexity which may be role-played. A presentation of the role-play dramatization is made for the general group of trainees, who then react to the situation by providing written responses on specially designed sheets. Following the presentation, a staff leader involves the general group by asking them to share their responses, and also raises additional questions for discussion. (SP 004 803, 805, and 806 are related documents.) (MBM)

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ROLE-PLAYING

in

PARAPROFESSIONAL TRAINING

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Role-playing is a technique that enables us to experience feelings and concerns of others in a variety of settings. We assume roles different from those we usually fill. We put ourselves in the position of another person.

The make-believe situation frees us to focus on real problems without apprehension. The atmosphere is non-threatening. The activity is fun, yet the serious realities that underlie the situations are apparent.

This booklet provides fifteen situations that may be role-played. Some are more detailed than others. In some instances, many alternative approaches are suggested. In others, the development rests on the ingenuity of the players.

In the design for training in which this booklet is used, teams take time to plan role-play dramatizations of the suggested situations. Interest can be increased if roles are switched in the course of the presentation. After the team has clarified what it intends to do and roles are assigned, a presentation is made for the general group.

Written responses are solicited from this general group on specially designed sheets. The observers identify the problem and the points of view of the individual players. The purpose of the written response is to force the observer to react to the situation. He cannot be passive.

The role-playing teams are expected to perform well enough so that the problem is easily identifiable in the dialogue and action. The team members do not preface the dramatization with explanations. They do not identify the problem or set the scene. These conclusions are drawn from the role-play itself.

Following the presentation, a staff leader involves the general group by asking them to share what they have written on the response sheets. The staff leader raises additional questions for discussion. These questions may follow the pattern of the ones suggested with each problem presented in this booklet.

FIFTEEN PROBLEMS

1. Should a paraprofessional accompany children on a field trip?
2. What if students resist the paraprofessional?
3. What if the paraprofessional contradicts the teacher?
4. What if the paraprofessional is too harsh with children?
5. What if the paraprofessional learns about a family problem? Should communication be open?
6. Should the paraprofessional perform tasks which serve only to make the teacher's personal life easier?
7. What if teachers resent paraprofessionals?
8. What if the paraprofessional gossips?
9. Do paraprofessionals destroy the integrity of the teacher?
10. Should the paraprofessional help the students he knows best?
11. Should teachers distrust certain paraprofessionals?
12. Should the paraprofessional be protective of the slow student?
13. What if the teacher is over-demanding upon the paraprofessional in the performance of housekeeping tasks?
14. What if the paraprofessional thinks that he is the teacher?
15. Should the paraprofessional make exceptions to rules which he believes are wrong?

FIFTEEN ROLE-PLAY SITUATIONS

1. The problem: Should a paraprofessional accompany children on a field trip?

   Mrs. Carroll, second grade teacher, and her aide, Mrs. O'Leary, have requested a meeting with the principal, Mr. Gromek, to discuss arrangements that have been made for a field trip experience. Mrs. Carroll has planned to have Mrs. O'Leary accompany a group of four children to the fire station just two blocks from the school. The trip involves crossing one intersection which ordinarily has very little traffic. Mr. Gromek reacts to these plans

   Suggested questions for discussion:

   Is this task one that can be performed by a paraprofessional?

   What planning is necessary on the part of the teacher? the principal?

   What are the legal liabilities involved?*

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*See S. Kern Alexander, "What Teacher Aides Can—and Cannot—Do." Nation's Schools (August, 1968), pp. 23-26.

What about parent permission slips? How do you train a person to monitor?

Possible response to questions:

Monitoring can be performed by a paraprofessional. Accompanying children on a field trip is a monitorial task. This particular "field trip" is relatively simple involving only four children, traveling only two blocks from the school. If the paraprofessional is experienced working with children and proper precautions are taken, there is no reason not to have the paraprofessional assume this responsibility. Parents should be informed of the plan and sign permission slips. The legal liabilities require that adequate planning take place, that the paraprofessional is trained to perform the assigned tasks, and that proper precautions are taken.

2. The problem: What if students resist paraprofessionals?

Mrs. Warren, a paraprofessional assigned to study hall duty, tells a student to "stop goofing around and to get back to work." The student replies, "I don't have any work to do, and besides, you're not my teacher!"

Suggested behaviors that might be dramatized:

The paraprofessional may choose to:

a.) angrily send the student to the office

b.) send the student to his counselor or homeroom teacher

c.) remind the student that you are in charge and insist that he find something to do and do it.

d.) send student to the library

e.) smile and do nothing

f.) assume a "hurt" expression, shake your head, and return to your desk

Suggested questions for discussion:

How essential is professional support for paraprofessional programs?

How do you train a person to monitor?

How much authority does the paraprofessional have over children?

Possible response to questions:

Professional support is essential to the success of the employment of paraprofessionals in schools. Training of professionals and paraprofessionals together is essential to avoid role conflict.

To monitor effectively, the paraprofessional must understand what standards of student behavior are acceptable. He must have knowledge of the school routines and procedures, and how to react in emergencies and have skills to anticipate and prevent problems.

3. The problem: What if the paraprofessional contradicts the teacher?

You are a teacher and you have been given an aide to assist you in the classroom. You have noticed that since her arrival the children have been going to her more and more for instructions. The paraprofessional is trying to be "helpful," but she does rescind your decisions. Nevertheless, she is conscientious and has been successful in doing many good things with the children.

Suggested behaviors that might be dramatized:

The teacher may choose to:

a.) talk to the principal

b.) talk to the paraprofessional

c.) dismiss the paraprofessional from the room

d.) prevent the paraprofessional from working with the children by giving her only clerical tasks

e.) criticize the paraprofessional in front of the children

Suggested questions for discussion:

What training might help to resolve this problem?

What if the teacher's decision is wrong; shouldn't the paraprofessional rescind it?

Possible response to questions:

Again, teachers and paraprofessionals must be trained together so that they may determine their respective roles. Rescinding a teacher's decision is a disruptive strategy. The teacher is the decision-maker, the person directly responsible for instruction.

As teachers and paraprofessionals are trained and then work together, misunderstandings are reduced. They learn to share. Paraprofessionals will be able to give valuable feedback about classroom activities and the behavior of students. Teachers will learn to use this information to improve instruction.

4. The problem: What if the paraprofessional is too harsh with children?

Mrs. Thomas, the paraprofessional who is an "expert" with her own children is especially critical of what she sees in the school. The teachers are too easy on the children who misbehave. They should "shake them up." The children lack respect and need discipline. They are coddled.

Suggested behaviors that might be dramatized:

The paraprofessional may choose to:

a.) discipline boys and girls in the lunchroom

b.) make her point of view clear to the principal, teachers, or neighbors

c.) gossip with other paraprofessionals

d.) "take over" the classroom

e.) undermine teachers she feels are too permissive

Suggested questions for discussion:

1. Is there an acceptable code of behavior for children in a particular school?

2. Is this code the same in all schools?

3. How might the principal help this paraprofessional?

Possible response to questions:

There is an implied code of acceptable behavior in every school. It is a code that varies from school to school.

The principal needs to make clear to Mrs. Thomas that her expectations for childrens' behavior is unrealistic in the school setting. Mrs. Thomas probably should have been screened out in the selection process. If not, her attitudes should be changed with training.

5. <u>The problem:</u> What if the paraprofessional learns about a family problem? Should communication be open?

Mrs. Olsen lives up the street from Mrs. Grabowski, a teacher-aide assigned to Mrs. Martinez, in whose class Mrs. Olsen's son, Phil, is enrolled. Mrs. Olsen confides to Mrs. Grabowski that Phil is smoking marijuana and that she doesn't know what to do about it. She feels that she doesn't want to speak to Mrs. Martinez or to the principal. She asks advice from Mrs. Grabowski. Mrs. Olsen feels that Phil's work is being affected. Mrs. Grabowski also recognizes that such may be the case. She has noticed that Phil is listless and withdrawn.

Mrs. Grabowski thinking out loud enumerates several possible courses of action. She decides on one particular strategy.

<u>Suggested questions for discussion:</u>

1. Is the information Mrs. Grabowski discovers important to Phil's success as a student?

2. Is it related to instruction?

3. What legalities are involved here?*

4. What obligations does Mrs. Grabowski owe Mrs. Olsen?

<u>Possible response to questions:</u>

Because the information is important to Phil's ability to learn, it must be shared with the teacher. Mrs. Olsen must be informed that Mrs. Grabowski will tell Mrs. Martinez.

The law requires that the possession of marijuana be reported to police authorities.

*See Alexander, <u>loc. cit.</u>

6. The problem: Should the paraprofessional perform tasks which serve only to make the teacher's personal life easier?

The teacher asks the paraprofessional to heat her lunch while the teacher goes to the lounge to have a cigarette. The request is typical according to the paraprofessional. The teacher considers the paraprofessional as her personal servant. Most of the paraprofessional's assignments are menial. The teacher is polite but aloof.

Suggested behaviors that might be dramatized:

a.) tell the teacher this is not the job of the paraprofessional

b.) perform the task grudgingly

c.) perform the task willingly

d.) complain to the principal

e.) just not do it

Suggested questions for discussion:

1. Is this an unreasonable request on even one occasion?

2. Should paraprofessionals be assigned to any menial tasks?

Possible response to questions:

This is not a reasonable request, but paraprofessionals should perform housekeeping tasks when the performance of these tasks are helpful to the classroom routine. These tasks are tasks that would be performed by the teacher ordinarily. The problem here is how the assignment of tasks is approached and whether the teacher treats the paraprofessional like a servant.

7. <u>The problem:</u> What if teachers resent paraprofessionals?

You are a teacher who feels that the paraprofessionals in your building are a detriment to the school. You feel that they are incapable of handling children in a school situation and that they can't learn enough in the time you can allot to their instruction. You have enough to do in handling your position as it is.

The teacher talks to school personnel who have a different point of view. For example:

a.) another teacher

b.) the principal

c.) a coordinator

d.) a paraprofessional

<u>Suggested questions for discussion:</u>

1. Just how responsible is the teacher for training a paraprofessional?

2. What should the teacher do if he feels that paraprofessionals are a detriment to the school?

3. How could advisory councils help in this situation?

<u>Possible response to questions:</u>

Training is the solution here and not on-the-job training. This training should be task oriented with emphasis on interpersonal relations and communications skills. Professionals should be trained with paraprofessionals.

8. <u>The problem:</u> What if the paraprofessional gossips?

The paraprofessional gossips about pupils by betraying confidences on matters revealed in school records and official communications. She may discuss: a.) academic failure, b.) intelligence scores, c.) personal health matters, d.) financial problems, e.) family matters, or f.) unusual habits or practices that stem from different racial or national background.

The paraprofessional gossips with another paraprofessional. Paraprofessional II realizes this is unethical. She responds by:

a.) continuing to gossip

b.) warning that such behavior will result in dismissal

c.) deciding to report paraprofessional to the principal or a teacher

d.) explaining the harmful aspects of such behavior

<u>Suggested questions for discussion:</u>

1. If paraprofessionals do not see official records, will many of the problems of betrayal of confidence be avoided?

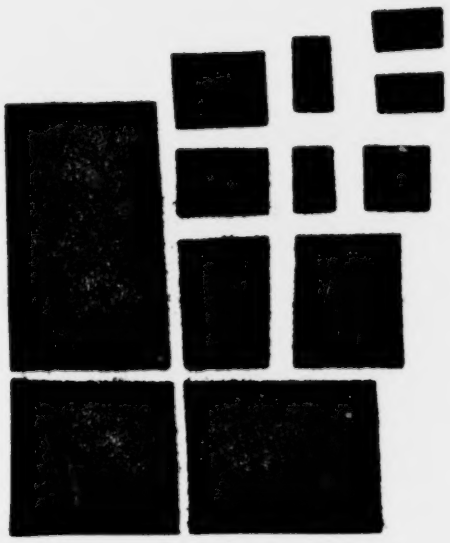
2. How can a district be assured that a paraprofessional will be ethically responsible?

3. How can the problem described above be resolved?

Possible response to questions:

Paraprofessionals will have access to information potentially more damaging than what's in an official record. They will learn about a child's limitations and family problems without ever seeing the materials in the files.

Paraprofessionals can be just as ethical as teachers. Ethics can be built into training. You don't have to have four years of college to become trustworthy.



9. The problem: Do paraprofessionals destroy the integrity of the teacher?

You are a teacher. There is a discussion being held in the Teachers' Room about paraprofessionals. You want the paraprofessional in your class because you have found her to be very helpful in dealing with parents and getting them more concerned with their children. Another teacher sees the paraprofessional as a threat because the teachers are losing their privacy and because they have to take time to plan what the paraprofessional is going to do. Develop arguments that support the practice of using paraprofessionals. The cast may consist of two or more teachers.

Suggested questions for discussion:

1. How can paraprofessionals increase the professionalization of teachers?

2. Why is training professionals and paraprofessionals together so important?

Possible response to questions:

Paraprofessional assistance enables the teacher to become more professional because the teacher is relieved of non-professional tasks. Research indicates that teachers spend from 29% to 60% of their time performing tasks which could be done by a trained paraprofessional.

10. The problem: Should the paraprofessional help the students he knows best?

Mrs. Robertson, the paraprofessional, has lived in the school community all her life. She knows the parents of almost one-third of the children in the class where she serves as an aide. Mrs. Mosley, the teacher, observes that Mrs. Robertson spends most of her time with the children she knows best. Mrs. Robertson says that she works with them because she understands them best, and because she is perceptive of their needs. The parents of these children recognize that Mrs. Robertson is giving their children special attention. Mrs. Mosley feels that Mrs. Robertson spends too much time with the same children.

Suggested questions for discussion:

1. How should the teacher resolve the problem?

2. In what ways is an indigenous paraprofessional particularly valuable to a school?

Possible response to questions:

A teacher working with a paraprofessional should have some skill in interpersonal relations and conflict resolution. Mrs. Robertson has a limited perception of role. Training could have prevented this problem from arising. Indigenous paraprofessionals provide a link between school and community.

11. The problem: Should teachers distrust certain paraprofessionals?

Mrs. Wendt, a paraprofessional, is the sister-in-law of the superintendent. Mr. Phelps, the teacher to whom she is assigned, is suspicious that Mrs. Wendt is an administration spy. Mr. Phelps discusses the problem with the union representative. The union representative takes the matter to the principal, Mr. Thompson. He demands that Mrs. Wendt be discharged.

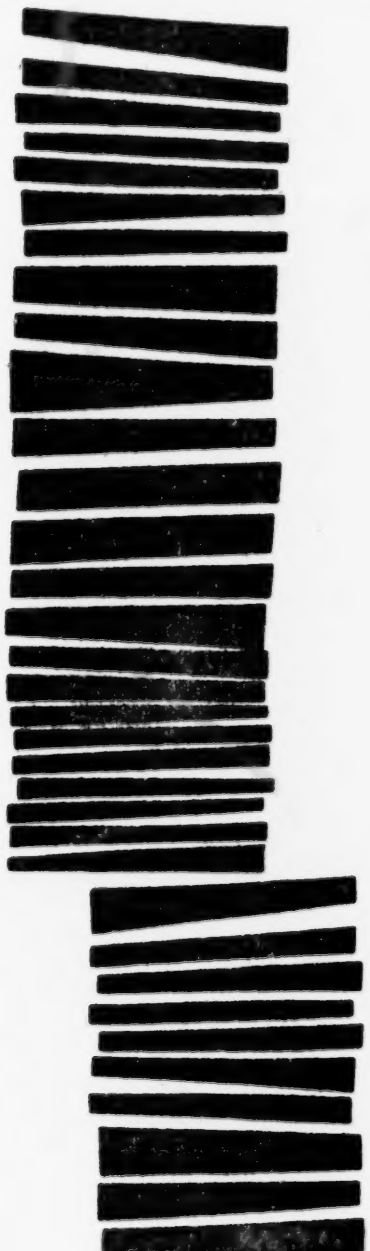
Suggested questions for discussion:

1. How could an advisory council help with this problem?

2. Should a relative of the superintendent be hired as a paraprofessional?

Possible response to questions:

Such problems could be aired in an advisory council meeting. A teacher representative could carry this concern to the advisory council. The employment of the sister-in-law of the superintendent as a paraprofessional is a questionable strategy.



12. The problem: Should the paraprofessional be protective of the slow student?

Mrs. Duckworth, the paraprofessional, gives hints of the correct solution of math problems and the correct spelling of assigned words to Billy Barnes, who has difficulty. With this help, Billy's homework is improved even though his skills haven't. The child becomes dependent upon the paraprofessional. The teacher discusses the problem with the paraprofessional. The paraprofessional informs the teacher that Billy really can do very little independently.

Suggested questions for discussion:

1. How should the teacher deal with this problem?

2. How can a paraprofessional help the slow child?

Possible response to questions:

No, the slow student is prevented from learning. The paraprofessional's behavior in this matter is totally irresponsible.

13. The problem: What if the teacher is over-demanding in the performance of housekeeping tasks?

Mrs. Freemont, the paraprofessional, is asked by the teacher, Mrs. Swanson, to perform only tasks like watering plants, straightening chairs, and feeding pets. At least, this is Mrs. Freemont's perception. Mrs. Swanson finds that Mrs. Freemont does these tasks well but senses considerable resentment about having to do them. Mrs. Swanson feels that Mrs. Freemont should perform all the housekeeping tasks with the aid of the children.

Suggested questions for discussion:

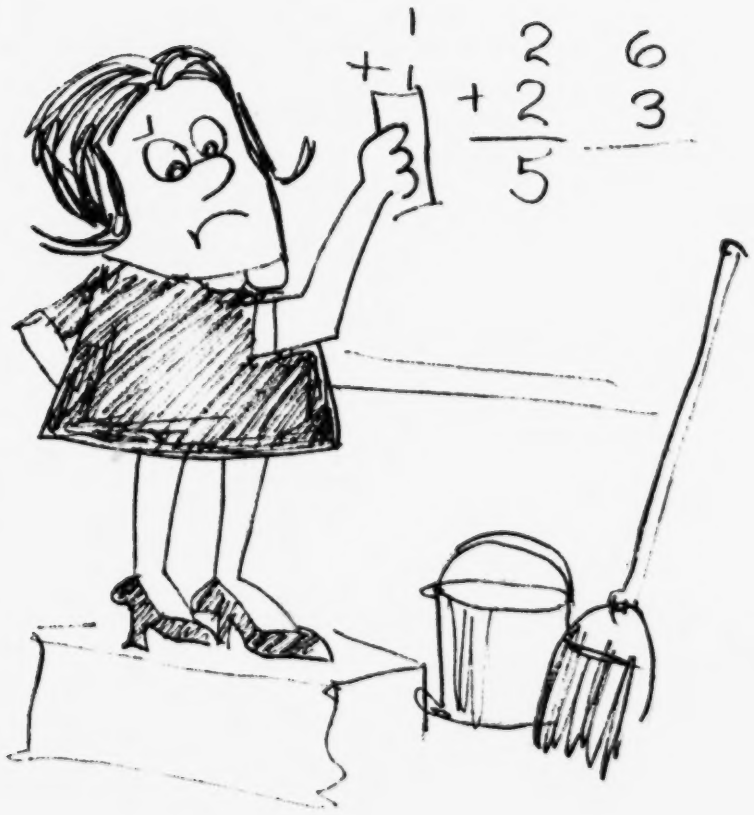
1. What housekeeping tasks might a paraprofessional perform?

2. Should some paraprofessionals perform only housekeeping tasks?

Possible response to questions:

A paraprofessional might perform any housekeeping task that a teacher might perform.

Housekeeping tasks are not the most valuable assistance paraprofessionals can provide.



14. <u>The problem:</u> What if the paraprofessional thinks that he is the teacher?

Mr. Boston, the paraprofessional, a retired minister, eagerly arranges a new bulletin board based on the lives of great men. He also brings in some books which interest the children. He arranges some games "that improve social studies skills" like learning the capitals of the 50 states and the names of all the presidents.

He is shocked by the language of the children and their manners. They don't say, "Please" or "Thank you." He insists the children call him, "Sir."

Mrs. Garson, the teacher, feels that Mr. Boston is taking too much for granted. She has her own plans for the bulletin board and her social studies activities do not involve learning the names of state capitals. Mrs. Garson is more permissive of the children's behavior than is Mr. Boston. Because of their conflict, Mr. Boston and Mrs. Garson air their differences.

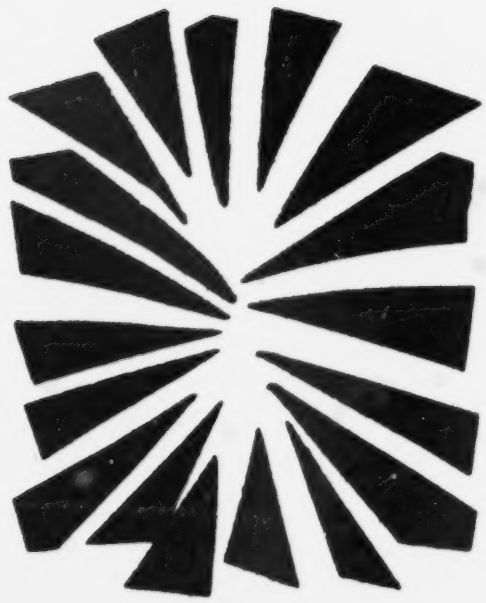
<u>Suggested questions for discussion:</u>

1. What if the paraprofessional has unrealistic expectations for the children?

2. Is it wise to use men as paraprofessionals in the elementary school?

Possible response to questions:

Mr. Boston's expectations will have to change. Men should be welcomed as paraprofessionals in schools.



15. The problem: Should the paraprofessional make exceptions to rules which he believes are wrong?

Mrs. Di Santis, the teacher, has established a rule that the child gets only one sheet of construction paper for the art project. The children have been told that they continue to work with that paper even if mistakes are made. If mistakes are made, the children are to improvise.

Billy, who is a perfectionist, has folded the paper incorrectly. In tears, he comes running to Mrs. Sanchez, the paraprofessional. He pleads for another sheet of paper. Mrs. Sanchez gives him another sheet, but tells him not to let Mrs. Di Santis know that she has given him a second sheet.

Suggested questions for discussion:

1. Can exceptions to rules be made by the paraprofessional sometimes?

2. Later, Mrs. Sanchez realizes that she has caused the child to be deceitful. What should Mrs. Sanchez do now?

Possible response to questions:

There are exceptions to every rule. Reasons must be given when exceptions are made. These reasons should be communicated not concealed. Causing the child to be deceitful is dishonest and indefensible. Mrs. Sanchez must face up to her behavior. She must tell the teacher. She also owes an acknowledgement of the mistake to the child.